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ABSTRACT

Decades of government interventions, an improved infrastructure, and support for industrialization have not resolved problems of persistent poverty in central Appalachia. This paper investigates characteristics of poverty previously overlooked in development initiatives and poverty research. In particular, it demonstrates the role of gender in the social reproduction of poverty in Pike County and Harlan County, Kentucky. Data are drawn from structured interviews with 44 working class women active in two union organizing campaigns in the early 1970s. Analysis, based on qualitative data of lifetime experiences in market and non-market labor, experiences in public schools and manpower training programs, and the structure and operation of households, reveals that different work and school experiences are understood through a "gendered lens." Range of economic opportunity, severely restricted for both sexes in an economy dominated by coal mining, is further limited for females by a gendered division of labor that equates women's work with employment in low-wage occupations or with non-market marginalized labor. Further, female status in households and families often prevents women from acquiring skills and qualifications to compete in highly restricted labor markets. Gender and family structure intersect with rural labor market structure to place women at economic risk, and these structures contribute to persistent poverty in these counties. This report contains 23 references. (Author/SV)

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SCHOOLING, WORK EXPERIENCE, AND GENDER: THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY IN APPALACHIA

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOLING, WORK EXPERIENCE, AND GENDER:
THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY IN APPALACHIA

Decades of government interventions, an improved infrastructure, and support for industrialization have not resolved problems of persistent regional and subregional poverty in Central Appalachia. This research investigates characteristics of poverty previously overlooked in development initiatives and research on Appalachian poverty. In particular it demonstrates the role of gender in the social reproduction of poverty in selected Appalachian counties.

Data are drawn from structured interviews with working class women active in two union organizing campaigns in the early 1970s. Analysis of qualitative data on lifetime experiences in market and non-market labor, experiences in public schools and manpower training programs, and structure and operation of households reveals that work and school are understood through a gendered lens.

Range of economic opportunity, severely restricted for both males and females in an economy dominated by coal mining, is further limited for females by a gendered division of labor which equates women's work with employment in low wage occupational sectors or non-market marginalized labor. Further, gender configures a particular female status in households and families which influences whether or not women acquire skills and qualifications needed to compete in highly restricted labor markets. Individual initiatives to acquire skills and enter paid labor result in contested gender statuses.

Gender ideology, gendered status within households, and a constricted sex segregated economic opportunity structure combine to place women at economic risk in these counties. Gender and family structure intersect with rural labor market structure and are implicated in persistent poverty.

SCHOOLING, WORK EXPERIENCE, AND GENDER:
THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY IN APPALACHIA

Introduction

> My mother got real sick and had to have surgery. For two years [she] wasn't able to do anything. I just quit school and took all the responsibility of the family.
>
> --Ardena Wheeler, Pike County, Ky.

> I don't think I ever had a job in a union place. Women didn't get nothing for their labor. We worked harder than men. That's the truth now. And we got less pay. I think I worked for a dollar and a quarter an hour.
>
> --Ruby Stacy, Harlan County, Ky.

On April 24, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson, First Lady Bird Johnson, several high ranking government officials, and members of the national press corps boarded six Army helicopters. They flew into the Appalachian coalfields, crossed over the West Virginia-Kentucky boarder, and landed just outside of Inez, a coal town of about 900 people in Martin County, Kentucky. The entourage traveled by bus through Inez, six miles on up Rural Route 3, and stopped at the home of Tom Fletcher, a 38-year-old unemployed coal miner who was married and had eight children. From Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher's front porch, President Johnson fired the first shot of a federal "War on Poverty".

Central Appalachia[1] was both the site of the origin of the War on Poverty and the battleground on which much of it was

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[1]A federally defined subregion of the larger Appalachian Region, Central Appalachia consists of sixty counties located in four states: Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee (Appalachian Regional Commission 1964).

fought. Twenty-five years later the region remains a classic example of persistent poverty and underdevelopment in advanced capitalist economies. Decades of government interventions, an improved infrastructure, and support for industrialization have not resolved the problems of regional and subregional poverty in Central Appalachia.

Most social scientists have moved away from pejorative cultural explanations of Appalachian poverty.* Limitations of such approaches have been exposed (Billings, 1974; Fisher 1976; Walls and Billings 1978), and more powerful analyses of persistent poverty in capitalist economies have been applied to Appalachia. The result has been an emphasis on such factors as land and resources ownership, class relations, industrial base, and labor markets (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force 1983; Eller 1982; Walls 1978; Seltzer 1985; Banks 1983-84, 1980; Clark 1981; Corbin 1981; Gaventa 1980; Tickamyer and Tickamyer 1987; Tickamyer and Duncan 1984).

Recently scholars have begun to pay serious attention to gender as a factor which shapes economic vulnerability in Appalachia. There is growing recognition that gender and family structure are implicated in poverty in general (Pearce and McAdoo 1981; Scott 1984; Sarvasy and Van Allen 1984; Kamerman 1984), and scholars have begun to apply this insight in their research on Appalachian poverty (Tickamyer and Bokemeier 1988; Tickamyer and Tickamyer 1986).

This paper is informed by the current research interest in the relationships between region, work, gender, and family structure in Appalachian poverty. In particular, I look at ways gender shapes experiences in the work force and in public school and operates as an important factor in the social reproduction of

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*Some explanations of regional poverty stress cultural factors, positing a subcultural identity which leaves residents ill-equipped and unmotivated to adjust to modern economic arrangements (Campbell 1969; Stephenson 1968; Weller 1965).

poverty.

The research

Data analyzed for this paper come from my research on women's involvement in two union organizing drives in eastern Kentucky in the early 1970s (Maggard 1988). One was a coal strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, which broke out in 1973, lasted thirteen months, and resulted in United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) representation for 180 coal miners. This strike was at Duke Power Company's mine at Brookside, Kentucky, and also resulted in the formation of the now-famous Brookside Women's Club featured in the film, "Harlan County, U.S.A."

The second strike was in Pike County, Kentucky. It broke out in 1972 at one of eastern Kentucky's largest hospitals, the Pikeville Methodist Hospital. There over 200 nonprofessional employees, almost all of whom were women, maintained a twenty-four hour picket line for more than two years in an unsuccessful attempt to win union representation under the Communication Workers of America (CWA).'

Both of these strikes lasted a long time. Strikers and their supporters were pitted against powerful, entrenched elites, and there were repeated violent confrontations which left residents on both sides of the struggles feeling as if they were under siege. In both strikes, women were at the forefront. They planned strike strategy, peopled picket lines, argued with union officials, personally faced their opposition, dealt with the press, testified in court, devised behind-the-scenes tactics to try to win their strikes, and went to jail.

In the course of my research on women's involvement in these strikes, I conducted structured interviews with forty-four participants. I collected life history and demographic data from

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'The issue of representation was not resolved in this strike until 1980, and legal skirmishes continued until the spring of 1983, nearly 11 years after the strike began.

each respondent, as well as data on strike actions. Analysis of data on market and non-market labor histories of women, experiences in public schools and manpower training programs, and the structure and operation of households allows me to isolate correlates of poverty for women in the eastern Kentucky counties where these strikes occurred.

Organization of the paper

First, I describe the particular economic vulnerabilities which burden women in the political economy of Central Appalachia. Second, I describe the market and non-market labor histories of women in my study. Third, I describe their experiences in public school and various educational programs. Finally, I discuss the gendered lens through which work and schooling are understood in these counties.

Gender and Appalachia's political economy

Pike County and Harlan County, Kentucky, are typical Central Appalachian counties. Local labor markets are dominated by one industry: coal mining. Political structures are tightly controlled by corporate interests. For the majority of residents, making a good, honest living is and has been a tough proposition.

In 1970, just before the strikes broke out, the structure of the local economy spelled limited opportunity and poverty for most residents. Income and earnings data, poverty status, unemployment and underemployment figures, and range of economic opportunity are all measures of economic viability. Data on these measures are summarized in Tables 1 through 4 and demonstrate the impoverished character of the local economies of Pike and Harlan Counties.

For women the situation in these counties in 1970 was particularly severe. Local labor markets in Central Appalachia are extremely sex segregated. Women are in an especially

vulnerable position in such labor markets. Aside from women whose training prepares them for coveted and politically controlled jobs in the educational sector, women find paid employment in personal service jobs, health services, retail sales, and (in certain other areas of the region) tourism and light manufacturing. Wages in these sectors are low, work is non-union, and benefits are poor to non-existent.*

Tables 5 and 6 illustrate this sex segregation in the local labor markets in Pike and Harlan Counties in 1970. Table 1 indicates the consequences: median earnings were $5,995 and $5,682 respectively in Pike and Harlan Counties for men; for women, these figures dropped sharply: $2,694 in Pike County and $2,611 in Harlan County.

Not only do women have few options for economic independence; women are also in vulnerable positions as dependent members of working class households. Many women live in households which rely completely or in large part on wages earned in mining. While mining has occasionally paid relatively high wages, it is a highly volatile industry subject to great swings in the demand for coal and for coal miners' labor. Women in such households have long been subject to sudden loss of income and to the recurrent unemployment of male household members employed in mining.

This situation is exacerbated by the high injury and death rates in mining. Women never know whether the coal miners supporting their families are going to be disabled on the job or, for that matter, return from work at all. In 1970, 16.4% of the women over age fourteen in Harlan County were widows, compared

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*At the time of the strikes coal mining jobs, except for clerical and office work, were barred to women. As late as 1975, 99.8% of all U.S. coal miners were men. There are accounts of women working in small, contract or family-run coal mines early in this century and during World War II, coal mining employment remained blocked to women until sex discrimination suits were filed and won under the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (Hall 1977).

with 13.1% in Kentucky as a whole (Table 7). Widowhood contributes to the large number of female-headed families in 1970 in the county: 15.2% compared with 10.7% for the state as a whole (Table 8).

In summary, labor market status and dependent household status mean that Appalachian women are particularly vulnerable to entering poverty, remaining poor, or slipping in and out of poverty.

Gender and work experiences in Pike and Harlan Counties

What sort of work do women do when they have few employment opportunities and when their families and households are continuously at risk? I asked women from each strike to identify all the jobs they have held and to talk about "work" in their lives. In recording their stories I developed a deep appreciation for their ingenuity, stamina, and good spirit. Taken together these women have done just about everything you could imagine to make a living and take care of families in the context of very limited economic opportunity.

"Work" is something these women do all the time. Sometimes they get paid money for doing it. Sometimes it is what they do in running their households. Sometimes work has been challenging and fun. Other times work has been "brutish", as one woman described her job at the Pikeville Methodist Hospital. All the time, "work" is underway.

Pike County hospital strikers' work histories

Of the twenty-four hospital strikers I interviewed, all had worked for wages before their strike (Table 9). They had held a wide variety of jobs, and most had fairly continuous histories in paid labor. Half of these women were heads of households (Table 10). All were contributing a major share of the economic base of their households.

Most of the jobs these women described were in low paid personal services, retail sales, and restaurant work. Some women, who had worked in other parts of the country, had also worked in low wage manufacturing. The following is a list of jobs they had held prior to going to work at the hospital:

*personal services:
housecleaning, motel cleaning, office and apartment cleaning, baby sitting, personal care, pressing clothes in a laundry, cleaning machines at a laundromat;
*health services:
aide in nursing home and hospital;
*retail sales:
clerking in shoe stores, discount stores, five and dime stores, groceries, drug stores, and clothing stores; door to door sales of household products and cosmetics; telephone sales; dairy farm sales collection;
*restaurants and food service:
waitressing, cooking, dishwashing;
*farm labor:
tending gardens, harvesting produce;
*manpower training programs:
nurse's aide, sewing project, special diet preparation;
*governmental work:
U.S. Census taker;
*clerical:
government official's office;
*proprietary:
managing small motel;
*manufacturing:
WWII riveter on bombers and repairman in plant.

All of the women began an intense pace of work when they were very young children. One woman's story, which I quote at some length, is a poignant example of the influence of gender on non-market female labor in Central Appalachia:

> As much schooling as I got was to the eighth grade. After my mother died I didn't get to go. I was the only girl at home. I was working, but at home.
>
> I'd go places and help people out where there was a new born baby. Do their cooking and washing and ironing. I did that quite often. Or if anybody was down sick, I went and helped. Most of the time I didn't get money because they didn't have the money to pay. But I still did it.
>
> I helped take care of my step-mother's sister until two weeks before she died. Then my grandmother, she was real bad off, and my daddy come from seeing her

and he said to me, "You go and take care of your granny." I went in early fall, and I stayed till my grandmother died in March or April.

My Aunt Meg had arthritis so bad that she had to walk around on crutches for I don't know how long. They had a big family, and they run a saw mill. Now Aunt Meg could sit and peal potatoes and things like that for me, but I did the rest of it. I washed on the board for them. They was four of the boys at home. Talk about a whole lot of-- by the time I'd get through washing their overalls and work clothes plus all their other clothes, I'll tell you, that was a job!'

When another woman described the home labor she did during most of her marriage she also illustrated the importance of women's non-market labor for the viability of households:

> We raised chickens and turkeys and everything here. Hogs. I have a big garden. Yards to mow and mow and mow. Paint the house. I've even put roof on the house. I plow my own garden. I mow the lawn. I do everything. We put sheet rock on the house. We floored it. We added on two rooms. I paneled that hallway myself. I helped put up every bit of sheet rock, panelling and all.

She got a job in the hospital kitchen after her husband died, but she continues this pace of work at home. She also makes and sells many hand-stitched quilts each year.

One woman worked for a dairy farmer as a teenager:

> My first job was a collector for Hopkins' Dairy. I was a collector when I was like 16 years old. I made $16 a week, which was good money. My brother delivered the milk. We delivered it in these bottles. They sterilized it at the dairy, and we delivered milk twice a day. I made out all the milk bills. He would deliver it, and I would collect for it.

Another woman got her first paying job at age eighteen in Illinois, a union job with the telephone company: "I was a `Number Please?' Back before they went dial." Later she joined the Navy where she learned nurse's aide skills.

Another woman worked as a young girl in Michigan during World War II in a unionized defense plant:

> It was during the war. Chrysler DeSoto Plant that made B29s and B39 bombers. I was riveter. I was listed as a

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'All quotations in this paper are from the author's interviews unless otherwise noted.

> repairman right at the last of my work. They didn't have a listing for a "repairwoman". So I was a "repairman".

She has worked as a sales clerk, a clothes steamer in a laundry, a salads cook at a Holiday Inn, and a cafeteria worker in the hospital. Of all her jobs, she liked being a riveter the best:

> I liked my work in Michigan better than anything. It was great. It folded up when the war was over. [It was] real good pay. You couldn't get a job like that here. But that job was fun.

The women who came out on strike in 1972 worked in housekeeping, the kitchen and dietary department, the business office, and as nurse's aides. Their working conditions were harsh, pay was low, departments were understaffed, benefits were poor to non-existent, and conditions had steadily declined over a period of several years.* One woman who worked in the hospital kitchen described her work this way:

> I always loved to work. I was brought up to work. But I think that there is brutish work that hurts. We really had that there at the hospital.

Another woman described the pressure she was under just before the strike:

> You work there, and you work like a dog. Work for 89 cents an hour for years trying to raise six kids on it. Then $1.05. Then $1.10. You couldn't get the [patients] all fed and bathed. The work load was too heavy. It just got till you couldn't handle it, and I guess it was [strike] or quit.

Economic need was the primary reason most of these women went to work at the hospital. But there were additional

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*The women reported a list of grievances that was staggering. The average wage among nonprofessionals at the hospital in 1972 was $1.68 a hour. Women had been working at the hospital for twenty years or more for almost the same low wage at which they had been hired. For example, one nurse's aide came out on strike making $1.87 an hour after thirty-one years of employment at the hospital. Above all, in every department, employees complained of excessive work loads. They felt they were not able to do their jobs properly or provide quality care because the hospital was seriously understaffed.

motivations as indicated by their comments below.

One woman, divorced after ten years in an abusive marriage, explained why she applied at the hospital:

> I had four little girls to raise. I thought if I could get a day shift and work when they was in school, then I could make enough to support me and the kids.

A nurse's aide, at the hospital five years before the strike, said:

> I have to work. I had a family that I had to support, although you didn't make enough money to really keep them. You fed them and that was about it.

Two close friends worked twenty and thirty-one years respectively as nurse's aides before the strike. One of them explained why they continued to work at the hospital despite coercive management policies:

> We both had to work because we were raising our children. Whatever they told us to do, we just done it. You didn't say, "I don't want to do that," or "I can't do this." If you had, they would have sent you home, honey.

Another woman who entered a federal Manpower Development and Training program[1] wound up with a job in the hospital kitchen. She said:

> I went to the unemployment office for work. Me and my husband separated, and I didn't have no way of keeping up the kids. They told me about this program they had going up at the hospital. They'd pay me for going to school. Special diet course: how to fix diets for diabetics, and people with heart trouble, and high cholesterol, and stuff like that. I really enjoyed it.
>
> After that was over they hired me there at the hospital. I was making just about the same as they was paying me through that government- minimum wage. I didn't use that [training]. It didn't help me a bit. The only way it helped me was getting the job. They did hire me after the program was over.

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[1]In 1965 the hospital had taken advantage of a new National Manpower Development and Training program which in effect subsidized its in-service training for nurse's aides, orderlies, ward clerks and dietary aides. Administered by the Mayo Vocational School, over a hundred hospital personnel had gone through the program by the time of the strike.

Several women left other jobs, hoping to earn more at the hospital. A woman from the housekeeping department said:

> I'd work three and four days, sometimes five, house cleaning in Pikeville. I thought maybe I might make a little more money there. Which I didn't make too awful much more.

One woman raised four children, working much of the time as a nurse's aide at the hospital. She bought and furnished her own home, holds down at least one paying job all the time, and personally landscapes her hillside around her home.

> I've did odds and ends work all my life. When I worked on the day shift, I used to work at a steak house in the evening three nights a week to make enough money for me and the kids to live on. 'Cause that wasn't enough. I have cleaned houses of an evening after I get off from work. I have worked at motels, cleaned rooms, worked in kitchens, washed dishes. Just anything to make an honest dollar.

Two sisters went to work at the hospital when they were caught between sources of economic support. One of them, a widow, had relied on Social Security to raise her son. In 1966 when this income was about to end, she followed the Manpower Training route to her job in the hospital:

> The dietary work. That was the work that, when I took the test for this training, I made high on. And of course dietary would work with hospitals. I was going to have to start working.

Through the training, she got a job in the hospital kitchen, although she, too, never worked planning diets.

Her sister expressed similar economic need. However, she added another reason for applying to work at the hospital. She said she "just signed up" at the hospital after her husband died.

But then she added:

> All three of my kids was married. So, I could have lived with one of them. But I didn't want to.

She had house payments and living expenses and choose hospital work in order to maintain her independence.

As her story suggests, for many of the women economic need

combined with other motivations for working at the hospital. One woman, a cook at the hospital for many years, had lost a job and decided to apply at the hospital:

> I had been baby sitting. I needed the work. We was paying for this place and his [husband] work wasn't all that steady. I didn't want to come home and sit here by myself.

Similarly, a woman who worked as a kitchen helper said:

> I've had to work for what I got. Nobody handed it to me on a silver spoon. I worked when I was married for us to have more. Or for peace of mind. I guess I'm not satisfied if I'm not doing something.

And again a woman from the kitchen department said:

> My husband was sick with black lung and hadn't got his retirement. I had two children in college. I just about had to go to work. And, the doctor had told me to go to work. I was at the age where I needed to be out.

Some women who felt they might have gotten by financially without a job did not want to stay home. One woman who worked in housekeeping said:

> My husband had died. When my family were all home I didn't have to work. I more or less took the job because I just needed something to do.

Two nurse's aides talked of a long standing desire to be a nurse. One woman, who had been at the hospital fifteen years when she came out on strike, said:

> I wanted to be a nurse. I never had the money to take the real nurse's training. I was always interested in nursing. That was my dream from eleven years up. I didn't work just for my paycheck. I worked because I enjoyed my work. I needed the paycheck also. Like everybody.

After the strike many women lost their jobs at the hospital. Some were not called to return. Some returned but were subsequently laid off. A few retired, although they have had difficulty collecting retirement benefits from the hospital. Most remaine active in the labor force. All continue non-market labor.

One woman with entrepreneurial talent came up with this business after she lost her job at the hospital:

> I started trying to run an ice cream truck after they fired me at the hospital. Didn't have a regular ice cream truck. The boys just brought a pick up truck. We set the cooler in the back, and we ran it from that. It was a step up truck. So I couldn't walk through to get my ice cream. We had to get out of the cab, climb up in the back, and sell our ice cream.

She and several family members now run a moving and repair service business out of her home.

Another woman works in a grocery store and also works with relatives in a variety of business activities. Of all the work she has done since the strike, she liked putting together house trailers the best:

> I'd help set up the trailers when they'd come in. The double-wides. Put them together. Trim them out. Any little bit of carpenter work I could do. I'd do all the electric hook-ups in them. Like if they hung chandeliers. I'd put lights on the outside doors. It just came natural.

Other women found jobs as cooks and waitresses in dairy bars and restaurants or as clerks in discount stores. Several women were hired by a nursing home in positions similar to those they held at the hospital. Two women leased and operated a hotel restaurant for a time. One woman has held a variety of clerical positions.

Two women got skilled jobs weighing coal shipments for a coal tipple. One of them now operates computerized scales and schedules shipments. Another woman works for a radio station where she occasionally dedicates late night music to the strikers.

These Pike County women worked for many years where ever they could find paid work. They do not define themselves in terms of particular jobs they held at the hospital or elsewhere. Instead, these women see themselves as workers, as breadwinners, and as homemakers. In a restricted and sex segregated local economy they continue to find ways to generate income, support and manage their households, and contribute to their families' well-being. Their primary motivation is economic need. For many

of them their labor market activity is a source of personal stimulation and independence as well.

Brookside women's work histories

In contrast with the hospital strikers, none of the twenty Harlan County women I interviewed were working outside their homes in paid employment at the time of the strike. Their labor market experiences were limited in comparison with the hospital strikers, and six of them had never held a paying job of any kind (Table 9). At the time they got involved in the coal strike, all of these women were managing households with a traditional division of labor and a single wage earner (Table 10).

Of the fourteen Brookside women* who had worked for wages before the strike, only six had worked at jobs in Harlan County. These jobs included personal services, work in gardens and farm fields, restaurant work, and retail sales, and they had been during teen years to generate additional family income. For example, this woman found various odd jobs as a young girl:

> At times I would baby sit for people up in the [coal] camp. Make extra money. [Mother] house cleaned for people and baby sat and washed and ironed while Dad worked in the mines. I've done other jobs in the camp, house cleaning. Stuff like that. Wash and iron.

Another woman who grew up on the hill above the Brookside mine recalled crawling over slate dumps and picking up lumps of coal to sell:

> I picked up coal along the tram track. I've had the motormans to kick it off. I've went down on the slate fill. I've asked, "Do you care for me to [be] picking coal out of the slate and selling it?" "No," they'd say. And I went to selling it.

Like the Pike County women, all of the Brookside women had worked hard as children. Some of this work was related to

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*I use the phrase "Brookside women" to refer to the women who participated in the UMWA strike at the Brookside Mine in Harlan County. Not all these women were actually residents of the Brookside coal camp.

keeping households in operation. Some of it was for small amounts of cash to help their families.

Two of the Brookside women had worked in cities where they had moved when their husbands could find no work in the coal mines. During these relocations they worked in light manufacturing jobs, at a laundry, and house cleaning.

One of these women worked seasonally, interrupting her employment for home work. Her "seasons" were determined by the school year:

> I just worked nine months out of the year while the kids were in school. In the summer time, why I'd have to quit and stay home until school started back again.

Two of her jobs were assembling picture frames and packing doughnuts. This is the way she described the work:

> We would put picture frames together. Fix, made, put the pictures in, and sealed them. Shipped them out to K-Marts and Woolworths. Places like that. Some were even shipped all the way to Texas. Just made pictures for every where.
>
> I worked on the conveyor packing doughnuts in boxes. You talk about fast work, now that was fast!

None of her jobs paid well or was unionized. She was quite aware that women were being exploited for cheap labor:

> I don't think I ever had a job in a union place. Back then you didn't get nothing. Women didn't get nothing for their labor. We worked harder than men. That's the truth now. And we got less pay. I think I worked for a dollar and a quarter an hour.

One woman worked as a nurse's aide in Michigan. Another worked during a World War II airplane plant. She had the most varied work history of the Brookside women and was self-employed running a small grocery at the time of her interview.

The Brookside women, like the hospital strikers, have worked hard all their lives. Most of the time these women received no income for their work. It was centered around their household status, first as children and later as home managers in families with few economic resources and a traditional division of labor.

After the coal strike, all the women continue their work at

home. But in the years that followed they have made changes in their lives, and some of these changes involved entry in the paid labor market. Only seven of the twenty women were still full time homemakers a decade after the strike.

One woman found a job a few years after the strike, but it was over her husband's strong opposition:

> When I went and applied for the job I have I just said, "I'm going to find me a job." [He] said, "Naw." I said, "Yes I am. I'm going to go to work." And, "Naw," he said, "you don't need to go to work." So I went more or less out of spite.

This woman defended her work as insurance for her family. Her husband has not had a mining job since the Brookside Mine was closed in 1981. She explained what she was doing this way:

> You can't never tell when you may need it. Even if I quit work tomorrow and [he] got a job, you can't never tell when, if it was in a coal mines, there'd be another strike. You always need something to fall back on. If I hadn't been working we'd probably lost everything we had when he got laid off. Once all the savings and the unemployment run out we would have probably lost it all had I not been working.

Another woman became a nurse's aide after the strike, but she has not been able to find a job in a hospital or clinic. She does private duty nursing a few days a week and cleans a grade school thirty hours a week. Two women are self-employed and own their own businesses (a body conditioning/physical therapy center and a neighborhood grocery store). One woman is looking for a job.

Another woman works full time with a large religious mission in Harlan County. She started her first paying job to help her family get by during the strike, but she quit that job to make peace with her husband:

> He always was the breadwinner until the strike. I went to work then. But as soon as he got back to work he made me quit. I liked working. But he made me quit. He just always said, "It's a man's place", the support.

But she soon found work with the religious charity. Since the Brookside mine was shut down her husband has been helping out at

the mission as well.

One woman learned carpentry skills at a vocational school and rebuilt her trailer, including putting on a new roof. She has done custom remodeling for a few people and uses her skills when she finds a project of interest to her. Another woman went to the vocational school to learn auto body repair. Occasionally she works with her husband who rebuilds cars when he isn't working in the mines.

Some of the work these women have done after the strike is non-market labor, but it moved the locus of their work outside their homes. Many of these women, for example, expected to stay active in the UMWA, helping to organize more mines in eastern Kentucky. One woman spoke eloquently about her intention to continue working as a union activist:

> While [husband] is working I'll help organize Highsplint. We'll go from one mine to the next...Then Arjay. Then go from Arjay someplace else. Just get the UMWA everywhere.*

This did not happen, however. She and her husband were divorced soon after the strike, and she moved away from the county. She works now cleaning houses.

Several of the women did travel to other UMWA picket lines and were involved in strike support during the 1974-75 UMWA contract strike which broke out within a few months of the Brookside victory. Some were invited to talk about their experiences at labor rallies and progressive social events in Appalachia and elsewhere. One of these women is a full-time homemaker caring for her elderly parents. She is a widow and disabled, but she dreams of going back to school and becoming an organizer:

> If I didn't have my mommy and daddy [to care for] I'd rather go back to school than anything. I'd love to. I'd just like to go back to school and make my mind up what I wanted to take. Really I'd like to be an organizer. That's what I'd like to be. I sure would.

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*Harlan County U.S.A. Out-takes, Box 197, CR 930.

For the mine workers.

One woman is proud to have been asked to talk about coal mining at a Harlan County elementary school:

> One year the Head Start teacher said, "We've got a science show. We'd like for you to fix like a miner and come over." Put me on a pair of pants, and an old sawmill shirt, and blacked myself all over, tucked up my hair. Put me on a bank cap. Hung me a carbide light. I went over there.

Another woman was active in the Harlan County Black Lung Association for a time. The grocery store she now operates is a meeting place for UMWA miners, and she retains her strong interest in union politics. She operates an unofficial social work service from the store helping people get legal aid and emergency relief, even pressuring civic organizations to provide eyeglasses for poor school children. Another of the women worked with widows of a mine disaster that killed twenty-six men at the Scotia Coal Company in 1976.

All of the twenty Brookside women saw themselves as housewives and homemakers at the time the coal strike started. Almost all of them said they had always thought they would be housewives. When the strike ended, however, many of these women moved away from dependent housewife status and sought new work experiences.

Gender, social class, and school

The labor market histories of the Brookside women were less varied and less continuous than the histories of the hospital strikers. The Brookside women had also completed less formal education (Table 11). Fewer had completed the eighth grade, fewer had gone to or completed high school, and only one had been through any vocational training programs.

In contrast, all of the hospital strikers had at least completed the eighth grade before quitting school. Of these twenty-four women, four had attended some high school, and four had completed high school. When the strike started, none of them

had formal schooling beyond the twelfth grade, but nine of them had taken advantage of government manpower training programs. In most cases this had helped them get jobs at the hospital.

Still, women from both groups gave similar reasons for quitting school. The most common reasons cited were financial. Many women said they simply could not afford to attend school, as the following comments illustrate.

A nurse's aide, who raised five daughters on her hospital pay and many "moonlighting" jobs, said:

> I had started high school. They'd be seven of us in the family and I really couldn't afford [school]. So I just got a job. Started doing restaurant work.

Another woman who quit school in the eighth grade said:

> Well, my grandmother couldn't afford to send me to high school. That's the reason I didn't go.

A woman who was active in the coal strike said:

> I didn't get no education. For people were poor. I had to walk off the top of that mountain, come over here to school. I got the primer, half the fifth and half the sixth. So I knowed nothing about talking to no reporters. I knowed nothing about heading up letters, like to write an individual person.

These were skills she found that she desperately wanted during the strike.

Another leader in the coal strike, had been a very good student but ignored her school principal's objections and quit:

> Whenever I left I promised the principal at the high school that I would come back and take the test and go on to graduate. I really and truly thought I would, because he had told me he didn't want me to leave. I was tellin' him, "No, I can make $35 a week baby sitting." I had to buy all the school clothes I had. Any food that I had at school I had to buy because dad just couldn't make it. When the mines worked, they didn't work enough for the men to support the size family that my mother and daddy had.

Several of the women spoke of feeling uncomfortable in school because of status differences. These "injuries" of class distinctions pushed at least one of the Brookside women to quit school:

> I passed two years in the sixth grade. I didn't like that teacher. I threatened to whip her. Me, a young kid, wanting to fight her. I didn't like her attitude. To me, it was like she was better than the student. She had things, and she'd flaunt it. She just showed off. It turned me off. So I finally just married.

Other women told of family crises which worsened already difficult financial situations and caused them to drop out of school. A nurse's aide from the hospital strike said:

> I left home to work. I worked for people, because our home burnt up and we lost everything we had. So I had to quit school and go to work.

A strike was the crisis that led one of the Brookside women to quit:

> I was going to high school. We was up in Michigan working then. [I got] three years. Wished I'd went plumb through. But dad was on strike, and they didn't have much money. I knew I couldn't afford it. So I just quit. Sometimes I wished I could have went back and got my education. Anybody needs one anyway to get a job.

This woman reared seven children, and at the time I interviewed her she had just told a potential employer: "I don't have any skills but raising kids."

In three instances, women from the coal strike quit school because of their own serious childhood illnesses. Financially pressed working class families were not able to provide extra support which might have kept these women in school. One of these women loved school and had dreamed of becoming a school teacher. She said:

> We just really had a good time. We had a little slate and our slate pencils. I loved geography. I loved that other than anything else in our school. We would have spelling bees, and I couldn't wait until we got into that. Sometimes I would miss one being sick. Back then I had asthma or something bad in the winter time, and they wouldn't let me go. I'd have to walk from, it'd be about two mile and a half I'd have to walk to school. They wasn't no buses. I went to the fourth grade.

Usually family crises were interpreted in gender terms. Female children quit school to assume work which was necessary to

keep households viable. For example, a nurse's aide who worked at the hospital for over thirty years said:

> My mother got real sick and had to have surgery. For two years [she] wasn't able to do anything. I had a brother a little over a year old. I just quit school and took all the responsibility of the family.

One of the Brookside women, who still dreams of becoming a nurse, said:

> I went about two weeks [high school] and quit. Daddy was sick. When he couldn't work we couldn't afford to go. I stayed home and helped Mommy out with him.

Another woman, who worked many years at the hospital as a cook, quit after the eighth grade:

> After my mother died I didn't get to go. See, I was the only girl among six brothers. I was the only girl at home.

She talked at length about enjoying the small country schools she attended along the Kentucky/West Virginia border. Still there was no question that she, rather than one of her brothers, drop out of school when her mother died.

One woman who worked in the hospital kitchen described blatant sexism as the reason her education ended:

> I turned sixteen - like school started in fall and my birthday was in March. I would have been sixteen. Mommy didn't believe in girls getting a education. I turned sixteen, and I had to quit and stay home. I don't know why she believed that girls shouldn't get an education, but she just wouldn't let us go. She's got five girls and not a one of us graduated from high school.

Several of the women said they quit school to get married, but in each case marriage was seen as a solution to other problems. One of the Brookside women quit the eighth grade when she was eighteen and married a much older man to escape an abusive home situation:

> I wasn't allowed to go anywhere by myself. Dad would whip me good. Dad was pretty rough on me. He would whip me and I guess, you know, when you're young - I took off. I wrote them and I told them I run off from home. Mom signed the papers for us to get married.

In most instances, however, a married daughter meant one

less child to support in financially troubled households. One woman's father had been on strike trying to organize a mine under the UMWA. When the strike was lost her family was in serious trouble:

> They [coal company] started giving house notices [evictions]. So people had to move. My dad got this house in Knox County, and we moved down there. We did have it rough for a while. He applied for his miner's pension and the black lung, and that took time. My mom had to go out and do housework for people in order to make ends meet. There was three of us in high school at that time, and it was rough going. As far as making expenses meet, it was really hard. I stayed down there about six months, and we married and moved back up here.

As adults, these women often repeated this pattern of personal sacrifice. Their gendered status in households and family units continued to take priority over their own desires for further education.

One woman made several attempts to become a Registered Nurse. She learned her skills as a nurse's aide by training as a "Girl in Blue" during World War II. In the early 1960s she took additional training under the federal Manpower and Development Training Act: "I got paid while I was going to school that time." Later, while she was on strike, she completed one year at a community college toward an RN:

> I carried a whole load, full load, sure did. Fundamentals of nursing and med-surg. Everything.

She could afford school this time because her union strike benefits amounted to more than she earned working full time as a nurse's aide at the hospital:

> I was off from school a long time before I even attempted that RN. I only took the eighth grade. Then I took the GED and passed it! That's what I got in the college on, and a letter from Dr. Ratliff that I was one of his special nurses. But then I got hired back at the hospital. I've got all my books, honey. Some of them wanted me to sell them. They said, "Why don't you just sell them?" I said, "Uh huh. I want to keep my books.

She retired at 65 and recently learned she could go back to the community college without paying:

> I could finish it and not even have to pay. But, my husband don't want me to. Somebody is all the time blocking me for what I've always dreamed about.

Another nurse's aide tried to return to school to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. She dropped out of high school because of a family crisis. Married now, family difficulties interfered once again:

> I went and signed up and was accepted. My youngest son had to have his appendix taken out and had to have surgery. So that knocked me out there. That's the reason I didn't go on. I couldn't leave my baby. I'd a went on made a LPN if it hadn't been for that.

In their youth and as adults, these women were expected to manage and support households rather than pursue their own education or develop marketable skills and qualifications. All of these women had quit public school at a young age and most had married young (Table 12). Their involvement in the strikes, however, was catalyst which prompted many of them to return to school, earn a GED, or acquire new skills.

Renewed educational efforts were most dramatic in the aftermath of the coal strike. Five of the twenty Brookside women took some further schooling or training after the strike. One woman enrolled in history and psychology classes at a nearby community college. Two women learned skilled trades in the area vocational school, and one woman trained as a licensed nurse's aide.

Another woman had nearly completed an undergraduate degree at the time of her interview. She enrolled at a community college under a federal support program:

> I started out in Elementary Education. Last semester I decided I'm going to Business Administration. I sort of cross between the two. Some federal money was allocated for education. They'd pay for books, tuition. Anything you needed toward an education. That's when I really started back to school. I had thought about it for a long time. When the money was allocated I thought, "Well, somebody else is going to pay for it. Why not?" If nothing happens come

> December I'll have my Associates Degree. Then if I decide to go on then I can.

One woman is determined to earn a Ph.D. She went to college after the strike, finished an undergraduate degree, and had almost completed a Master's Degree at the time of her interview.

> I was the first one [in family] to get a Bachelor's. My two brothers and a sister, they had Associates, but I was the first one to get a Bachelor's. I'm going to be the first to get a Doctorate. Let me tell you!

Findings and conclusions

Popular depictions of generations of people debilitated by poverty have been challenged by research demonstrating high levels of labor force activity and high levels of income-generating activity among the rural poor.[10] My research corroborates these findings. In addition, it demonstrates high levels of work by women which has no direct financial compensation for impoverished families but which is necessary to keep households viable. Further, this research demonstrates determination and initiative among women in the face of limited options for education, training, and acquisition of labor force experience.

In Pike County, the hospital strikers are either heads of households or major contributors to household income. They work in paid labor where ever they can find it. Their motivations are primarily economic, but they are also in the labor market to find stimulation and satisfaction in non-home work. They make repeated efforts to improve their educations and qualifications, despite burdens of economic and household labor. Their comments and work histories indicate initiative, desire, and ingenuity despite limited economic opportunity and constraining gender roles and

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[10]Kenneth Deavers demonstrated this for the United States in November 1986 at a meeting on Rural Poverty at the Brookings Institution. Similarly, Mary Beth Pudup's (1990) research on the informal economy in West Virginia confirms a long history of income-generating activity among poor families in Appalachia.

attitudes.

In Harlan County, the Brookside women moved from traditional gender statuses in households to active participation in a coal strike which promised to improve their household circumstances. Subsequently many of the women have taken steps to acquire new skills, further their educations, and move into paid labor and non-paid labor outside their homes. In the process they have re-negotiated constraining gender relations.

Work and schooling are understood through a "gendered lens" in working class households in these counties. Women's work is often equated with unpaid and marginalized home labor. Still, many women are heads of households, and all contribute both paid and unpaid labor essential to household survival. Women, who have the most restricted labor market options, are active and essential workers in the local and household economies of this region.

Education for females is often not considered a "family priority", particularly when households have a marginal or vulnerable financial basis. Any unusual stress in these households usually means women interrupt schooling to pull families through hard times. Further, home work and household responsibilities stay with women throughout their lives making attempts to improve educations and qualifications particularly difficult.

Gender relations influence the way women acquire or fail to acquire skills, education, and work experience. Gender configures a constraining female status in households and family units. Individual initiatives which disrupt gender relations often result in contested gender statuses.

Efforts to address poverty in Appalachia must incorporate a gender-informed analysis of local labor markets, schools and educational programs, and household structure and operation.

Table 1. Income and Earnings for Kentucky, Pike and Harlan Counties: 1969

	The State	Pike County	Harlan County
Total Families	825,222	15,524	9,456
Income, all families % earning:			
<$3,000	18.5%	27.6%	31.7%
3,000 - 3,999	7.3	10.0	12.5
4,000 - 4,999	6.8	8.5	8.3
5,000 - 5,999	7.1	9.2	8.4
6,000 - 6,999	7.1	7.3	6.6
7,000 - 7,999	7.2	7.9	6.6
8,000 - 8,999	7.2	7.3	6.6
9,000 - 9,999	6.3	5.7	4.3
10,000 -11,999	10.9	6.8	5.6
12,000 -14,999	10.0	5.0	4.8
15,000 -24,999	9.2	3.6	3.5
25,000 -49,999	2.0	0.7	0.9
50,000 or more	0.4	0.4	0.1
	100%	100%	100%
Median Income	$7,441	$6,326	$4,682
Per capita income of persons	$2,437	$1,706	$1,593
Median Earnings, persons 16 years and older			
Total Males	$6,369	$5,995	$5,682
Total Females	$3,357	$2,694	$2,611

Table 2. Poverty Status for Kentucky, Pike and Harlan Counties: 1969

	The State	Pike County	Harlan County
Income less than Poverty Level			
Families	158,779	4,930	3,442
% of all families	19.2%	31.8%	36.2%
% receiving public assistance income	22.3%	20.0%	27.1%
Mean family size	3.64	4.09	4.18
Families with Female Head	36,343	853	871
% with related children under 18 years	75.4%	68.7%	70.0%
Unrelated Individuals	105,681	1,519	1,446
% of all unrelated individuals	51.2%	68.2%	67.6%
% receiving public assistance	15.4%	19.6%	21.9%
Persons	718,313	21,701	15,740
% of all persons	22.9%	35.7%	42.2%
% receiving SS income	19.5%	18.3%	19.3%
% 65 years and over	18.1%	13.8%	12.9%
% receiving SS income	75.0%	69.9%	77.4%
Related children under 18 years	272,710	9,163	6,603
% living with both parents	66.0%	74.9%	68.8%
Households	165,912	4,353	4,152
% of all households	22.1%	35.4%	40.6%
In owner occupied units	81,233	2,395	2,008
Mean value of unit	$ 8,282	$ 6,398	$ 4,692
In renter occupied units	84,679	1,958	2,144
Mean gross rent	$55	$37	$37
% lack some or all plumbing	34.6%	54.8%	59.8%

Table 3. Employment Status for Kentucky, Pike and Harlan Counties: 1970 (Persons 16 Years and Over)

Employment Status	The State	Pike County	Harlan County
Total Persons	2,227,425	40,364	25,423
Civilian Labor Force	1,141,594	16,170	9,166
Employed	1,088,758	15,108	8,515
Unemployed	58,836	1,062	651
% Civilian labor force	5.2%	6.6%	7.1%
Not in Labor Force	1,045,863	24,169	16,247
% of total persons	46.9%	59.8%	63.9%
Workers in 1969	1,331,936	17,418	10,019
% Worked 50-52 weeks	56.3%	54.6%	47.5%
% Worked < 50 weeks	43.7%	45.3%	52.2%

Table 4. Industry of Employed Persons for Pike and Harlan Counties: 1970 (Persons 16 Years and Over)

Industry	Pike County	Harlan County
Total Employed Persons	15,108	8,515
% employed in:		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	0.3%	0.6%
Mining	34.4	24.7
Construction	7.5	6.2
Manufacturing	4.2	7.5
Transportation	5.1	2.7
Communication	1.3	0.6
Utilities, sanitary services	2.2	1.3
Wholesale trade	2.4	3.5
Food, bakery, dairy products	3.4	4.0
Eating, drinking places	1.6	1.8
Retail trade	10.2	11.7
Finance, business, related services	3.5	4.4
Private households	1.3	2.1
Other personal services	2.1	3.4
Entertainment, recreation services	0.4	0.4
Health services, including hospitals	4.6	6.3
Education	9.4	11.0
Other professional, related services	2.4	3.6
Public administration	3.7	4.2
	100%	100%

Table 5. Industry of Employed Persons by Sex for Pike County: 1970 (Persons 16 Years and Over)

Industry	Male	Female
Total Employed Persons	11,088	4,020
% employed in:		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	0.5%	0.0%
*Mining, construction	55.3	5.0
Manufacturing	4.9	2.2
Transportation	6.2	1.9
*Communications, utilities, sanitary services	3.4	3.6
Utilities, sanitary services		
Wholesale trade	2.9	1.0
Food, bakery, dairy products	2.0	7.2
Eating, drinking places	0.2	5.4
Retail trade	8.6	14.4
Finance, business, related services	3.4	3.5
*Private households, other personal services	1.1	9.9
Entertainment, recreation services	0.5	0.2
Health services, including hospitals	1.8	12.6
Education	4.9	21.8
Other professional, related services	2.1	3.5
Public administration	2.2	7.8
	100%	100%

*Industry category differs from Table 4: census combines categories in reporting county level data by sex.

Table 6. Industry of Employed Persons by Sex for Harlan County: 1970 (Persons 16 Years and Over)

Industry	Male	Female
Total Employed Persons	5,854	2,661
% employed in:		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	0.9%	0.0%
*Mining, construction	44.0	2.1
Manufacturing	9.0	4.2
Transportation	3.8	0.4
*Communications, utilities, sanitary services	2.2	1.0
Utilities, sanitary services		
Wholesale trade	4.5	1.2
Food, bakery, dairy products	3.5	5.0
Eating, drinking places	0.1	5.4
Retail trade	8.8	18.1
Finance, business, related services	4.8	3.5
*Private households, other personal services	2.0	13.4
Entertainment, recreation services	0.5	0.3
Health services, including hospitals	2.3	15.2
Education	6.5	20.9
Other professional, related services	2.9	5.1
Public administration	4.2	4.2
	100%	100%

*Industry category differs from Table 4; census combines categories in reporting county level data by sex.

Table 7. Marital Status for Kentucky, Pike and Harlan Counties: 1970

Marital Status	The State	Pike County	Harlan County
Males, 14 years and over	1,141,799	21,195	12,802
Single	27.9%	27.7%	29.3%
Married	65.3	67.5	64.6
Separated	1.9	0.8	1.1
Widowed	3.0	2.7	3.2
Divorced	2.7	2.1	2.7
% Married	66.3%	67.6%	64.7%
Females, 14 years and over	1,221,486	22,421	14,352
Single	20.5%	21.2	21.3
Married	61.0	64.8	59.1
Separated	1.5	1.0	1.8
Widowed	13.1	11.3	16.4
Divorced	3.8	2.8	3.3
% Married	62.5%	64.8%	59.1%

Table 8. Household and Family Characteristics for Kentucky, Pike and Harlan Counties: 1970

	The State	Pike County	Harlan County
All Persons	3,218,706	61,059	37,370
Number of households	983,665	17,335	11,168
Persons in households	3,118,607	60,614	37,133
Primary individual: Male	733,118	13,919	7,985
Female	109,087	1,500	1,431
Persons per household	3.17	3.50	3.32
All Families	820,880	15,419	9,416
% with own children under 18 years	54.3%	57.7%	52.5%
% with own children under 6 years only	26.0%	27.8%	23.9%
Husband-Wife Families	710,223	13,388	7,673
% of all families	86.5%	86.8%	81.5%
% with own children under 18 years	55.6%	59.4%	53.4%
% with own children under 6 years only	13.6%	29.0%	25.5%
Female-Headed Families	87,762	1,500	1,431
% of all families	10.7%	9.7%	15.2%
% with own children under 18 years	50.4%	48.7%	52.9%
% with own children under 6 years only	7.1%	16.7%	16.3%
% under 18 years old	35%	38%	37%
% under 18 living with both parents	82%	83%	76%
% 65 years old and over	11%	9%	11%

Table 9. Waged Labor Experience of Women in Pikeville and Brookside Case Studies Prior to Strikes.

	Pikeville Respondents		Brookside Respondents	
Held paying jobs prior to strike?				
Yes	24	100%	14	70%
No	0	---	6	30%
N =	24	100%	20	100%

Table 10. Household and Family Characteristics for Women in Pikeville and Brookside Case Studies. (1972 and 1973 respectively)

	Pikeville Respondents		Brookside Respondents	
Husband-Wife Families				
with children	10	41.7%	18	90%
with no children	2	8.3%	1	5%
Female-Headed Families				
with own children only	4	16.7%	0	--
with no children	2	8.3%	0	--
extended family group	2	8.3%	0	--
Single, roommate	1	4.2%	0	--
Over 18 living with one				
or both parents	1	4.2%	0	--
and own children	2	8.3%	1	5%
N =	24	100%	20	100%

Table 11. Educational Characteristics for Women in Pikeville and Brookside Case Studies at the time of the strikes.

		Pikeville Respondents		Brookside Respondents	
Years of School Completed					
Elementary: <	8 years	0	---	8	40%
	8 years	16	66.6%	4	20%
High School:	1-3 years	4	16.7%	6	30%
	4 years	4	16.7%	2	10%
College		0	---	0	--
N =		24	100%	20	100%
Manpower training programs		9	37.5%	1	5%

Table 12. Age at First Marriage of Women in Pikeville and Brookside Case STudies.

	Pikeville Respondents	Brookside Respondents
Age at marriage		
15	1	6
16	2	2
17	3	2
18	1	4
19	5	2
20-29	8	4
30-39	2	0
40 or over	0	0
Never married	2	0
N =	24	20
% married during teen years	50%	80%
% married after teen years	42%	20%
% never married	8%	---

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